

Rules of the Game

Monstrous Conundrums (Part Two)

By Skip Williams



Anyone who plays the **D&D** game encounters the term "level" often. It seems that almost everything in the game has levels: **spells**, **characters**, encounters, even dungeons. (For an example of this in action, so to speak, you might take a look at [The Order of the Stick](#) strip on this very topic.) In general "level" is a measure of power or inherent danger. The higher the level, the more power or danger. This week, we'll sort out the variations on the term "level" as it applies to monsters and monsters that also are members of **character classes**.

Class Level

Gaining a **class level** grants a **creature** a host of benefits, as a look through the class descriptions in the *Player's Handbook* will show. Here's a summary of the perks a class level grants:

- A **Hit Die**. The class description shows the Hit Die's size. If this is the first Hit Die the creature receives, the Hit Die has the maximum result.

When a creature of the **humanoid type** with one racial Hit Die or fewer gains its first class level, the racial Hit Die is dropped in favor of the class Hit Die. Creatures of other types simply add the class Hit Die to their existing Hit Dice, even if they have only one racial Hit Die. (The text dealing with monsters as races in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* doesn't make this clear, but the text in the *Monster Manual* does; see page 290). If the creature has levels from other classes, the Hit Die from the new class is added to the creature's total Hit Dice.

From page 190 of the *Monster Manual*:

Humanoids and Class Levels: Creatures with 1 or less HD replace their monster levels with their character levels. For example, a goblin sorcerer loses its humanoid attack bonus, saving throw bonuses, skills, and feats, and gains the attack bonus, save bonuses, skills, feats, and other class abilities of a 1st-level sorcerer.

- **Base attack bonus** and **base save bonuses**. The table included in the class description shows the amount of each bonus. If the creature drops a racial Hit Die in favor of the class Hit Die (see the note at Hit Die, above), the bonuses from the class level replace the bonuses the racial Hit Die provides. If the creature has racial Hit Dice that aren't dropped, or other class levels, add the base attack bonus and base save bonuses to the creature's existing totals.

Remember that a creature is entitled to extra **attacks** when its base attack bonus is +6 or higher, provided it uses the full attack action. See page 59 in the *Player's Handbook*. Creatures using **natural**

weapons don't gain extra attacks from a high base attack bonus.

- **Skill points.** The class description shows the number of skill points the class grants at each **level**.

If the creature drops a racial Hit Die in favor of the class Hit Die (see the note at Hit Die, above), the skill points from the class level replace the skill points from the dropped Hit Die. If these are the first skill points the creature receives, the allotment of skill points from the class is quadrupled.

If the creature has racial Hit Dice that aren't dropped, or other class levels, add the skill points gained from the class level to the creature's total skill points. In this case, do not quadruple the skill points from the class, even if this is the first class level the creature has earned (the creature has already received quadruple skill points for its first racial Hit Die; see page 172 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*).

From page 172 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*:

Other Statistics for Monsters: Creatures with Hit Dice of 1 or less have normal, class-based Hit Dice and features. They get a feat for their first class level and multiply the skill points for their first class level by four (even if they have a level adjustment). Those with 2 or more Hit Dice have statistics based on these Hit Dice plus Hit Dice for class levels (if any).

The creature treats any skill included in its creature description as a class skill; however, it must spend the skill points as a multiclassed character. Its maximum rank for the racial skill is **character level** +3 (see page 59 in the *Player's Handbook*). If the racial skill is not a class skill for the class that gave the creature the skill points, though, the creature still must pay two skill points for one rank in the skill.

- Class features and bonus feats (if any). The class description shows any special powers, spellcasting, bonus feats, or other benefits the class level grants. Any level-based variable a class feature has uses the creature's class level for the variable no matter what the creature's total Hit Dice, character level, or **effective character level**. For example, an astral deva with 5 **paladin** levels has 17 Hit Dice (12 racial Hit Dice and 5 class dice) and an effective character level of 25 (thanks to its **level adjustment** of +8). Nevertheless, the character deals 5 extra points of **damage** with its smite evil power, because it is only a 5th-level paladin.

If a creature gains the same power from two or more different sources, it combines its level from each source to determine its effective level for that power. For example, an astral deva has the uncanny dodge power of a 12th-level **rogue**. If an astral deva gains 5 rogue levels, it has the uncanny dodge power of a 17th-level rogue.

See the section on multiclassed characters in the *Player's Handbook* (pages 59-60) for more information about combining class abilities.

Character Level

As noted in Part One, character level is the total of all the class levels and racial Hit Dice a creature has.

Character level affects the following aspects of the character:

- Feats.

As noted in Part One, a creature has one feat for its first level or Hit Die and gains another feat at each character level evenly divisible by three. Bonus feats the creature receives from its race or from any class levels the creature has are in addition to the feats it has gained from its character level.

- Ability Increases.

A creature gains a +1 increase to one **ability score** every four character levels. This is not a bonus, but an outright increase. The improvement stacks with any temporary or permanent ability score bonuses the creature might receive.

- Experience awards for single monsters.

When awarding experience for a monster that player characters have defeated, you must compare the PC's character level with the monster's Challenge Rating to determine how much experience to award; see page 37 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

- The next class level.

A creature's current character level determines how much experience the creature must earn before it can add its next class level, as shown on Table 3-2 in the *Player's Handbook*.

- Cash and equipment.

Use character level when referring to Table 5-1 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

Effective Character Level (ECL)

When a character has a level adjustment, add her racial Hit Dice, class levels, and level adjustment to get her effective character level. Use effective character level instead of actual character level when determining the experience award the character receives for defeating a monster, the experience the character needs to reach her next class level, and for determining how much cash and equipment the character should have. Also use effective character level to decide when the character can select epic feats and when it gains an epic attack and save bonus (see page 209 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*).

What's Next?

That wraps up our look at class levels, character level, level adjustments, and effective character level. Next time, we'll conclude our look at monsters with class levels by examining the ins and outs of crafting encounters featuring monsters that have acquired class levels.

About the Author

Skip Williams keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies and was the Sage of *Dragon Magazine* for many years. Skip is a co-designer of the **D&D** 3rd Edition game and the chief architect of

the *Monster Manual*. When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.

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